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*Christianity, mysterious; but not irrational.*

A

## DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF A NEW CHAPEL

AT

WHITCHURCH, SHROPSHIRE,

FEBRUARY 8, 1798.

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BY ROBERT LITTLE, Pastor of the Independent Church

*At Hanley, Staffordshire. And afterward Minister*

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*at the*

*Tabernacle, North.*

Where roll my thoughts  
To rest from wonders? Other wonders rise;  
And strike where'er they roll: My soul is caught;  
Heaven's sovereign blessings clust'ring from the cross,  
Rush on her in a throng, and close her round,  
The pris'ner of amaze!

YOUNG.

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PUBLISHED FOR THE BENEFIT OF A CHARITY SCHOOL,

IN THE TOWN OF WHITCHURCH.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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*As the author has no other concern with this publication, than complying with the desire of the worthy person, who was the instrument of commencing the cause at Whitchurch, in committing it to the press; he feels no sort of difficulty, in requesting his friends to promote the sale of a pamphlet, the object of which is good, let the contents be what they may. If it should lay the foundation of a useful charity school at Whitchurch, no one ought to think the trifles mis-spent which purchased it. And if it establishes any in the belief of the Gospel, the expence will bear no proportion to the benefit they receive.*

*Hanley, March, 1798.*

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*Christianity, mysterious; but not irrational.*

**I. TIMOTHY, III. 16.**

*And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness:  
God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of  
Angels, preached unto the gentiles, believed on in the world,  
received up into Glory.*

**T**IMOTHY, in the early part of life, was called by the grace of God, to enjoy a saving experience of the power of religious truth upon his heart; turning him from error, sin, and folly to serve the living and true God. This was to him a distinguishing token of divine mercy. But, that mercy, distinguished him still further; for he was called early in life, to preach those truths to others, which he himself had received. He was commissioned to engage in the honourable, arduous employment, of turning men from "darkness to light, and from the " power of Satan unto God; that they might receive an inheritance among all them who are "sanctified by faith in Jesus Christ." Timothy's advantages in the prosecution of this work, were as singular, as his call to it. He was under the tutoryship and direction of the great Apostle Paul.

**man**

man, whose remarkable conversion, extensive knowledge, miraculous gifts, zeal for Christ, and love to immortal Souls, together with the consideration of his being inspired with the Spirit of God, must have made his advice most weighty and interesting; and will always endear his memory to the Church of Christ. This Man, I say, so wonderfully qualified by *Grace, Experience and Labours*, became the friend, the instructor, the father of young Timothy. This, and the following epistle, are proofs of his concern for the honour and usefulness of our new Preacher.

The design of Paul, was, (as he himself expresses it,) to instruct Timothy how he ought to behave himself in the Church of God. In the discharge of the christian ministry, two things are especially to be aimed at: A proper discipline in the Church; and purity of doctrine in the pulpit. It is therefore desirable to know what system of religious truth, the Apostle, wished Timothy to preach and maintain. Seeing truth is unchangeably the same, through all ages; and of never-ending importance. The information we wish, is conveyed in the words of our text; which contain a summary of that kind of preaching, with which christianity began its race, and by which such wonders were accomplished.— Some good critics, have chosen to place the period of the last sentence, and the commencement of this,

in the latter clause of the 15th verse. They would therefore read the passage, in this manner. \*

"The pillar and ground of the truth, upon which the whole system depends, is without all controversy, the great mystery of Godliness; God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of Angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." These, these are the great, the fundamental truths, on which our salvation depends; and from the promulgation of which we alone can expect the conversion of Sinners!

Whether this criticism be just, or not, will not at all affect our intended application of the words to day. We are met here to open for religious worship this place. It is our ardent wish and prayer brethren, that the plain, but glorious and efficacious truths preached by the Apostles, may always be taught here. Convinced that nothing else can do good to Souls, we would have these walls only echo, with the pleasing, useful sound of the Great Mystery of Godliness!

It shall be our business this morning—FIRST—To confirm and illustrate the Apostle's assertion, *Great is the Mystery of Godliness!* Secondly. To

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\* See among others who favour this interpretation—Dr. Doddridge's Family Expositor on this Passage.

consider the various particulars mentioned in the text as contained in that mystery.

We begin with attempting to confirm and illustrate this plain assertion—**Great is the mystery of Godliness!**

We understand by the word Godliness, in general, an holy life in obedience to the commandments of God. So the Apostle is to be understood when he says “Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.” But in our text the word must have a different meaning, for an obedient life cannot be called a *great mystery*, although obedience is rare. By Godliness, here, we cannot be greatly mistaken, if we suppose the Apostle to mean, the whole system of divine truths, in their nature and effects, as revealed in the person and doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Religion of the Bible, is godliness; because God is its author, and the creatures conformity to his will, the ultimate object of its revelation. This system may be compared either to a curious, complex piece of machinery; or to a stupendous edifice: We view from time to time, its several parts distinctly, and are impressed with admiration of its beauty, suitableness, and harmony. But if at any period, our attention is arrested by the whole scheme at once; if all its connected parts pour in their blaze

of truth, and glory on the soul; we are dazzled with so profound a display of eternal wisdom; and overwhelmed with astonishment exclaim, Great is the Mystery of Godliness!

Not only in this, but in various other passages of Scripture, the grand scheme of redemption for fallen man, is represented a Mystery. Three things appear to justify this phrase when applied to the Gospel. First, because this plan was HIDDEN. Secondly. In a certain sense it is INCOMPREHENSIBLE. Thirdly. Wherever it is made known, it is purely a matter of DIVINE REVELATION. These three characters constitute the mysteriousness of the Gospel Scheme. Let us examine them respectively, in their application to the subject before us.

Paul speaking of the Gospel, declares it to be  
“the mystery which hath been Hid from ages, and  
“from generations.” *Coloss i. 26.*

I. *It was hidden in the eternal mind of Jehovah, from everlasting.* In the bosom of the great triune God, was this wonderful plan projected before ever he created the world. It being the chief design of the Lord, to exhibit his unbounded perfections in all their lustre, and establish his own eternal glory, in the great work of human redemption; he made this universe to be subservient to his grand design. We

are therefore essentially wrong in our Judgment, if we imagine the work of Salvation to be an after-thought of Deity, suited to the exigency of Men. No, the gradual evolution of this infinitely wise and glorious work from age to age, was only a manifestation of what dwelt in the unsearchable mind of God, from before the foundation of the World.\* Hence the inspired Apostle describes the intention of his ministry, "to make all men see " what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from " the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, " who created all things by Jesus Christ." Ephe. iii. 9.

II. *This Mystery was hidden under all the types and shadows of the Jewish Ceremonial Law.*

We are by no means to conceive that their way of salvation, was different from ours; or peculiar to themselves. Much less are we to imagine that their mass of Rites and Ceremonies, were senseless insignificant things. Such a conclusion would display not only our ignorance, but our guilt; while the pen of Inspiration hath told us that they were "a shadow of good things to come." Heb. x. 1.

—Tabernacle, Altar; Temple, Priests, Sacrifices

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\* Those who wish to see this subject illustrated and confirmed at large, would do well to consult President Edward's, most excellent treatise entitled—  
*The HISTORY OF REDEMPTION.*

and

and Purifications; I see emblematically set forth in you all, a better service, a complete attonement, an ever-living Priest and Intercessor, and a sanctification perfect, and endless. In short, I see the Gospel; partially obscured by figures, and types; hereafter to be explained and fulfilled.

**III.** *It is hidden in the scriptures.* For it is certain that those sacred oracles, however clearly they reveal the mind and will of God, are to the major part of mankind who enjoy this blessed privilege, "a sealed Book." The love of sin, and averseness to spiritual things, which universally prevail among men, hinder their understanding this glorious light of truth. The defect is not in the scriptures, but in ourselves; whom "the god of this world hath blinded;" so that we grope at noon day, as in the darkness of the night. Hence Christ advises us, to "buy of him eye salve that we may see." Rev. iii. 18. To prove how much the Gospel scheme of salvation is hidden in the Scriptures from the general cognizance of men, we only need turn our eyes towards the thousands of our fellow creatures, who with the blessed bible in their possession, are still ignorant of, and unconcerned about Eternal Life.

**IV.** *This mystery of Redemption was hidden in the Person of Jesus Christ.* Meaness veiled his glory;

and obscured the grandeur of his nature and mission from view, while he dwelt among men. Though he was the Lord of all worlds, the great proprietor of the Universe, and "God overall blessed forever," he was cloathed with frail humanity; subject to many infirmities and weaknesses; on account of which, when he came to his own even his own received him not. We shall indeed have occasion more fully to speak presently, of this native dignity and glory; it shall therefore only be our business now to state; that in him, and in his work God displayed the unfathomable riches of his grace in redeeming Sinners: And yet to the unbelieving Jews it was a hidden Mystery. So speaks the inspired writer, "In whom (Christ) are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." *Coloss. ii. 3.*

But we asserted farther, that this mystery of Godliness, is in some respects *Incomprehensible*.

Yet let it be remarked here, that we do not mean by this Phrase, that the Gospel system is unintelligible: That its doctrines are contradictory to reason, or inconsistent with themselves: Or that its authenticity, as a revelation from God, is incapable of rational and decisive evidence. Neither do we wish to insinuate, that the truths we preach, demand a blind assent, without conviction; instead of the exercise of the understanding, in examining

their

their nature, or degree of importance. Although these conclusions are drawn by the enemies of evangelical preaching, to its no small disparagement, yet we disclaim them all. — This mystery of Redemption, though in its full extent and glory, it is deep and unsearchable, still invites enquiry; and as far as discovered, appears wonderfully consistent with itself, with reason, and with the best interests of the Children of Men.

In two things however, the Gospel remains an unfathomable, Incomprehensible mystery.

I. *Because mere human reason, unaided by divine influences will evermore remain a stranger to it.* Humbling as the truth may be, and disagreeable to proud aspiring man; both Scripture and Fact unite to prove that fallen creatures are under a moral inability to understand or improve the things of God. A strong prevailing bias of the inclination to sin, prejudices the passions, beclouds the Judgment, and effectually bars the mind against a cordial reception of the Truth. It is not at all surprising therefore, that many of the Wise and Great in the world, esteem the gospel foolishness, and utterly reject it, seeing these are under the strongest temptations to gratify themselves in worldly and sinful pursuits. To this purpose we read, one of the first and greatest teachers of Christianity saying, "We speak the wisdom

“ of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom  
“ which God ordained before the world to our glory.  
“ Which none of the princes of this world knew; for  
“ had they known it, they would not have crucified  
“ the Lord of glory.--But the natural man receiveth  
“ not the things of the Spirit of God: For they are  
“ foolishness unto him; neither can he know them,  
“ because they are spiritually discerned.” I. Cor.  
ii. 7, 8, 14. These and various other passages  
confirm us in the persuasion that without divine  
grace, removing the obstinacy of the will, and  
enlightening the understanding, a man will never  
humbly, heartily, and thankfully receive the Gospel  
of Jesus Christ. In ascending the pulpit to declare  
these glorious truths, such a prayer as this well be-  
comes the christian preacher: ‘Lord as an instru-  
ment, with my work assigned by thee, I am about  
to speak to my poor fellow sinners about thy great  
salvation. I can only describe some faint traces  
of its glory, insist upon its importance, and recom-  
mend a cheerful reception of this proffered Grace.  
Here my work ends; here let thine begin! O may  
thy Spirit sweetly seal the truth, with power on  
every soul: Subdue the stubborn sinner’s pre-  
judice, and open thou, the eyes of the blind; else  
thy blessed word will remain to them, an inex-  
plicable mystery still!’

II. *This mystery of Godliness, is in its full extent incom-  
prehensible*

*prehensible inasmuch as many of its parts will always remain, rather objects of Faith, than of knowledge.*

This observation is consistent with the notions we ought ever to entertain of a divine revelation. It is natural to connect with our idea of a revelation, that it contains truths which otherwise could not have been known; and which even when known, are not capable of full explanation by any of the common modes of reasoning among Men.

Let us not think that this is designed only as a covert, under which some of the more abstruse doctrines of the Gospel may pass unexamined; for many of its plainest, and most generally acknowledged truths fall under the same description. What think you of the being and perfections of the Deity? Is this a subject free from mystery? Nay, rather it is involved in awful obscurity. We abhor the name of Atheist: And yet if we reject mysteries from our creed, we are on the borders of that detested state. Even an heathen was conscious of this. I mean Epictetus; who when pressed to declare his opinion respecting the nature and attributes of God, said—“If I would fully declare what God is, I must be either God myself, or God must be what he is not.”\* A Confession, which

\* His words are said to be—*Si omnis ego Deum declararem, vel ego Deus sum, vel ille Deus non foret.*

might put some, professing Christianity to the blush, for presuming with mortal powers to scan the Deity, and prescribe bounds for his Conduct.

Notwithstanding it has become the fashion of the day, to decry mysteries in religion, we may affirm with confidence, that the man who will persevere in refusing to credit, what he cannot comprehend; must ultimately renounce all the evidence of his senses, and become a mere visionary in nature, as well as a Sceptic in Religion. It is not in the doctrines of scripture alone, that we find incomprehensible mysteries; all nature is full of unfathomable wonders. Facts constantly present themselves to view, in every walk of human life, to account for which, the most subtle reasoning fails.—The most accurate observers of nature, rather amuse us with words, than satisfy our enquiries, when we push our researches among the remote causes of the most common events. How the vital heat of the human frame is generated and maintained; or how the action of the muscles, in moving our various limbs, is excited; or indeed, how a single blade of Grass is vegetated; are subjects involved in impenetrable mystery. The curious conjectures, and fine spun dissertations, of Philosophers on these themes; have evinced how much may be said, where little can be proved.

Shall we then deny to spiritual topics, what we admit on natural ones? How absurd and inconsistent it is, for creatures whose utmost sagacity fails to fathom even the objects of their senses, with which they are hourly surrounded; to adopt as a maxim, that matters of pure revelation, should be tried by the standard of their puny reason.

Let us however thankfully acknowledge that this mystery of Godliness, is the grand subject of **DIVINE REVELATION.**

The method of salvation for guilty man, is made known to us, as far as is necessary for our personal happiness, if we are enabled to embrace it by faith.

I. *It is the general theme of the Scriptures.* Patriarchs, Historians, Prophets Psalmists, Evangelists, and Apostles concur in pointing us to the Lamb of God who taketh away the Sin of the world. But more particularly, in the dispensation of the gospel, it is made known to all the nations under the canopy of Heaven; as a blessing common to all who will receive it, without distinction. So we read. “The mystery which was kept sacred since the world began, is now made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.” Rom. xvi. 25, 26.

II. *It is revealed to the hearts of men, by the enlightening influences of the Holy Ghost.* No truth is more constantly inculcated in the Bible, than the necessity of divine illumination to enable a man to understand and receive, the glorious truths of the Gospel. To deny that God *can* influence the human mind, to faith and obedience, is at once absurd, and blasphemous: to assert that he *does not* do it, is equally unscriptural and dangerous. Hear, the inspired preacher of the Gospel praying for his professed converts; "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,—give unto you, the spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." Ephe. i. 17, 18. O may that same infallible teacher of the church, remove every thing from your minds which hinders a cordial reception of his blessed word; and enable you cheerfully to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, as he is freely offered to you in the Gospel!

III. *This discovery of the Mystery of Godliness, is an act of distinguishing grace.* The observation applies equally well, to the preaching of it as an external privilege; or the inward application of it to the heart by the Spirit of God. God was under no obligation

obligation to send these tidings to us rather than to the savage inhabitants of Africa, or other Heathen Lands. Nor can any thing, except his own sovereign will, be deemed a sufficient reason why we should feel its power, and enjoy its blessings, when so many thousands who hear it preached are utter strangers to these mercies.. Thus our Saviour addresses his disciples, “ Unto you it is given to “ know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but “ unto them that are without, all these things are “done in Parables.” Mark, iv. 11.

In these various views we have taken of the first article of our discourse, the expression of the Apostle appears sufficiently justified, “ Without contro-  
versy great is the mystery of Godliness!” We proceed therefore,

Secondly, to examine the different particulars mentioned in the text as contained in that Mystery. “ God, was manifest in the flesh,—justified in the “ spirit,—seen of Angels,—preached unto the “ gentiles,—believed on in the world,—received “ up into Glory!”

These indeed must not be considered as an analysis of all the truths the Apostles taught; but a sample of some of the most important ones. Their preaching however was very little more than the

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candid, unadorned statement of a few plain facts, with the addition of some simple, but cogent arguments to establish their truth, and earnest exhortations, attentively to consider, and heartily to receive them. They founded all their expectations of usefulness in preaching, upon the certainty of its being God's appointed instrument of saving Sinners. They knew indeed, that such plain declarations of the work, sufferings, death, and exaltation of their master, would be esteemed by the great and wise, mere "foolishness," if designed to reform and regenerate the human mind; but they also knew from experience, and observation, that these unlikely, these foolish things, became "the wisdom, and power of God," to all them who believed. Had the Philosophers of that age, or, of any age, been consulted on the most probable means of converting an ungodly world, from wickedness and vanity; they would have doubtless concurred in supposing a good system of morality, with proper rules for each department of Life, accompanied, with suitable encouragements to obedience, and threatenings of punishment for crimes, the most likely method to succeed. And especially if the aid of the civil power was obtained to sanction the attempt, no human scheme would seem more likely to effect the great design.

But how manifestly, is "the foolishness of God,

wiser

"wiser than men; and the weakness of God, stronger than men!" I. Cor. i. 25. What the energetic oratory of the ancient moralists, and the refined speculations of modern philosophers, have failed to effect; the plain declaration of redemption in a Saviour's blood most amply accomplishes.

When the civil power armed with terror, and breathing out threatenings and slaughter, proves inadequate to restrain impiety, and regulate the conduct of men; then the preaching of Christ crucified may be resorted to with effect. Behold, the lion changed to a lamb! See, the singular effect of Gospel grace, in making the profane, pious; the unclean, holy; and transforming the slaves of sin, into the sons of God! We may remark here, that if we desire or expect our preaching to produce such effects as these, it must be conducted on the Apostolical plan. It should have less of wordly wisdom in it, and more of that primitive simplicity which becomes the doctrines of the Cross.

Let us now attend to the sample before us, of the christian doctrines supported by these primitive preachers.

I *God was manifest in the flesh.* Well might the Apostle call this a mystery, for it certainly is one of the highest in our creed. Indeed this article seems

more

22 *Christianity, mysterious; but not irrational.*

more repugnant to our usual modes of thinking, than even the sublime mystery of a trinity of persons in the ever blessed Jehovah. That the eternal God, whose nature in every point of view, infinitely transcends the most laborious researchs, and loftiest flights of the human mind, should exist in a mode exceedingly different from every inferior being; and perhaps in some circumstances, contrary to our common notions; ought not in the least to stagger the faith of any, who believe in his incomprehensible greatness and glory. But when I consider that the infinite God is exalted by his nature and perfections farther above the highest order of created beings, than the noblest Angel in heaven, is above the meanest reptile that crawls upon the earth; and yet am informed by revelation, that this God appeared in human nature; that " he was made flesh and dwelt among us;" that in Jesus of Nazareth, " dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;" and that this fact makes a great and essential part of the christian religion; I am constrained to exclaim with the Apostle, Great is the mystery of Godliness!

However, let it be remembered that although these important doctrines are above human reason, they are not contrary to it. For the question which we have to do with, is not, How a being essentially One, can be personally Three; nor, In what man-

ner a person in the divine nature, should be so united to a human being, as to become in connection therewith, identically one person. The only rational enquiry in the present case is, Are these things really revealed? For seeing revelation as well as creation, may properly be supposed to contain many inexplicable mysteries; right reason will always bow to faith when she presumes to tread upon such hallowed ground.

We are taught in the scripture, of Jesus Christ, that his name may well be called "Emmanuel which being interpreted is, God with us." Matt. i. 23. And, that he "being in the form of God, " thought it not robbery to be equal with God: "but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a Servant." Phil. ii. 6. 7. It is worthy of remark here, that the same word is used in the original, as well as in our translation, to express his dignity, and his meanness. He was in the *form* of God, and in the *form* of a Servant. So that this passage leaves us no more room to doubt of his dignity, than of his abasement: Since both are expressed by the same word. And a man who in the face of this text will deny his Deity, might with equal propriety deny his humanity. That he was a servant, and a man, the bible asserts; it also asserts that he was God. Blessed Redeemer, let us never make such a base return for thy condescend-

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ing love, as to refuse thee the glory which is thy rightful property, because thy compassion for Sinners induced thee to hide it beneath the veil of frail mortality!

II. *Justified in the Spirit.* Jesus Christ was attested in the divinity of his mission, and the truth of his doctrine, by the Spirit of God. This renders the rejection of his glorious salvation most compleatly iniquitous and perverse. In two ways did the Holy Spirit of God, justify the claim of Jesus to the character of the Messiah. By enabling him to perform miracles of divine power; and by accompanying his preaching with invincible energy to the consciences of men. Perhaps both these are included in the passage before us: both are exemplified in the history of his Life. That power which was exerted by him in raising the dead, enlightening the blind, healing the diseased, and loosing the tongues of the dumb, is ascribed to the mighty influence of the Holy Ghost which always attended him “God “annointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost “and with power, who went about doing good, “and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; “for God was with him.” Acts. x. 38.

By this same Spirit, when he taught the word of God, sinners felt its power. Their objections were refuted, their profane cavils silenced, and over-

whelmed

whelmed with astonishment, they exclaimed,  
"Never man spake like this man." John, xii.  
46.

III. *Seen of Angels.* The glorious character, and important work of the blessed Redeemer, were not much known or noticed by men. But the neglect and coldness displayed in the temper of mortals, was more than compensated by the attention and respect he received from the heavenly host. It was no disparagement to the Saviour, that corrupt and ignorant man, rejected him. While wise and holy spirits who dwell in the world above, esteemed themselves honoured by his presence, and served him with the most peculiar delight. The testimony of Angels to the glory of Jesus Christ should be a confirmation of our faith in him, and be esteemed by us, as an additional honour to our profession. These natives of heaven descended at his birth and sang "Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth peace, good-will towards men!" When he conflicted with his, and our, grand adversary in the wilderness, they witnessed his triumph with holy joy, and prepared refreshment for his fainting frame! They were spectators of his deepest sufferings when dying on the accursed tree, and beheld the Son of God bowing his head in death, with far other sensations than what were felt by the surrounding vulgar crowd! They waited on his

resurrection

resurrection, and gladly rolled away the ponderous stone which covered his sepulchres' mouth, that his reanimated body might rise to an everlasting life! Nor did their vigilant attention, and tender care cease here, for when he had accomplished all his work on earth, they gladly joined his triumph as he ascended up on high. These Chariots of God, these thousands of Angels, hailed him welcome to the skies! Their shouts rent the very portals of heaven, with "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; " and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the "King of Glory shall come in.—Who is this King of Glory?—The Lord strong and mighty, the "Lord mighty in battle; the Lord of hosts, he is the King of Glory! Lift up your heads O ye gates, even lift them up ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall enter in!"\* Thus was Jesus seen, and adored by angels. O may our stubborn hearts feel deeply affected to day, at reflecting on the stupidity manifested by us, while all heaven is occupied in contemplating and praising the work of Christ.

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\* I have made free with the above allusions to a part of the XXIV & LXVIII. Psalms, from a persuasion that both of them, as predictions, refer to the Ascension of Christ—and particularly the former. The difficulty of some, in making certain passages of Scripture speak common sense, probably arises from a fear of applying them to him in whom alone they are, or can be accomplished—Jesus Christ.

IV. *Preached to the Gentiles.* It was the folly of ancient Jews to suppose that all the blessings of true religion were to be confined among themselves. Had they attended as they ought to have done to the ministry of their prophets, they would have discovered that it was the intention of God, to extend the blessings of his salvation to the end of the Earth. When the contracted notions of the Apostles were removed, they went and preached Jesus Christ to the Gentiles; as the only way of salvation, suitable and effectual for all who believe. Paul, gloried in being called to "preach unto the gentiles, the unsearchable riches of Christ." Eph. iii. 8. It ought to be esteemed our mercy, that ever the mystery of godliness, was announced in the preaching of the Gospel to gentile sinners! If this part of the text had not been true, we should probably have been worshipping with profane rites, the Sun—Moon—and Stars, yea meaner creatures, like our heathenish forefathers; instead of serving the great God who is blessed for ever. Let us not vainly ascribe those improvements to our superior intelligence or industry, which result wholly from the pure light of divine revelation shining in upon us. The worth, and advantage of a preached gospel, can scarcely be computed in the present Day. Enjoying its benefits in such rich profusion, the amazing contrast between the state of mankind without it, and with it, is unperceived. But even

this

this blessing, great and unmerited as it is, is of very little consequence to the immortal interests of men when it is separated from the article which follows.

V. *Believed on in the World.* The mystery of Godliness is revealed and preached, that it may be believed. The gospel is a message of grace; and it has pleased the Lord to connect our personal enjoyment of its blessings, with a cordial reception of its testimony. But such is the depravity of the human heart, that it habitually dislikes this way of obtaining salvation, and prefers any mode of seeking the divine favour, to that which he has appointed. Over this obstinacy and prejudice, the grace of God alone can triumph. It renews the whole man; and makes the most inveterate unbeliever, sit with the meekness of a little child, at the Saviour's feet to receive his words. When you read in the history of the church, what astonishing effects succeeded the plain declarations of salvation by a crucified Jesus, when first the apostles engaged in this work, you will esteem it not the least wonderful part of this dispensation that Jesus Christ was believed on in the world. The downfall of paganism, the ceasing of heathen oracles, the rapid, and almost universal spread of christianity through the civilized world; without earthly pomp, without the sword of power, and even in the face of the most dreadful opposition, can only with reason

son be ascribed to the secret power of God. Devils beheld, with confusion and dismay, their empire on earth falling into complete ruin! Their helshih craft, and power, were more than overcome by the superior efficacy of the "great mystery of Godliness!" The same grace is necessary still, to teach and enable men to believe. Every man who under the preaching of the word has his heart humbled with a sense of guilt, and constrained to embrace and rely on that sacrifice once made upon the cross, is an evidence of the standing truth and glory of the "Mystery of Godliness." That faith which procures peace for his conscience, and promotes the holiness of his life, attests the efficacy of gospel truth in matters which no other remedy can affect. O! that some of you, may experience this day the blessed influences of the Holy Spirit, drawing you towards Jesus Christ, to believe on him, and rejoice in him as your Portion!—It is added.

VI. *Received up into Glory.* These words occurring at the close of the passage we have been considering, have a very singular appearance. But let it be remembered that all the important work of redemption, as it is now going forward in the world, is carried on under the immediate inspection and government of Jesus Christ. He sits enthroned in everlasting bliss and glory, as the great moral governor of the world. If he did not reign, this

mystery

mystery of Godliness, would presently be scouted from the earth, as most unworthy the attention of men; most inimical to their pursuits. The glorified state of the Mediator, is an encouragement for us to trust in him. He was once crucified in weakness, but he now liveth by the power of God. He has entered into the presence of God for us; to receive gifts for men, even the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them. Let us resolve in our minds with increasing pleasure, that Jesus ever liveth; that he witnesses in the heavenly world our devotion to his cause on earth: And I trust he will accompany with his blessed spirit, the ministry of his holy word in this place, that men may be converted from sin, and brought to a saving acquaintance with the great mystery of salvation through his precious blood!

I will conclude our present address with a few serious reflections drawn from the subject at large.

*The plain facts recorded in the bible, as the fundamental truths of Christianity, ought to form the principal subject of our ministry.* The wisdom of men may indeed suggest a more probable method of rectifying the Judgment, and mending the morals of our fellow creatures: But let us recollect, that this is God's way. It hath pleased him, by the foolishness of preaching, Christ crucified, to save those who believe.

The

The boasted rationality of socinianism has failed, and will ever fail, to produce a single convert from sin and vanity, to an holy, devoted life and walk with God. It is the Cross, that most unlikely instrument, that God continues to honour in a preached gospel to the salvation of men! Blessed be his name, that ever we heard of this great Salvation!—May these walls resound with these blessed truths, till they crumble into dust! May chilling error never obtain an entrance here! And O! that many, many souls may be born to God here, that they may experience his grace on earth; and inherit his glory in heaven!

*Whatever is mysterious in the Gospel is no good cause for its rejection.* Blessed God! shall we, who cannot explain by what kind of energetic operation it is, that we are able to lift up our hand, to our head, call in question the truths thou hast revealed; and at the bar of our puny reason, arraign the wisdom of Jehovah! My brethren, let us with humble thankfulness receive the doctrines of the Gospel. Let us rejoice in the prospect of a period when we shall have all difficulties, and darkness done away from our Judgment; when we shall know, as we are known, and be for ever with the Lord!

*The rejection of the gospel will be followed by consequences unspeakably awful.* The evidence that it came from

God

God is complete and unequivocal. Its substance is of infinite importance to all mankind. As it has pleased the Almighty, to send the preaching of it among you; you will do well to consider, how you can answer at his bar another day, for now trampling upon the offers of his grace. May he pour out his Spirit upon you; and give you a serious concern to be better instructed in this great mystery of Godliness; that it may appear at that day, we have neither preached, nor heard the word of God in vain!

**F I N I S.**



